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SUBJECT: ISRAELI FM LIVNI TELLS CODEL BERMAN: ABBAS CANNOT BE ALLOWED TO BE "FIG LEAF" FOR HAMAS

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR NORMAN H. OLSEN FOR REASONS 1.4 (B)
AND (D).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: Codel Berman met on February 26 with FM Livni and representatives from the MFA. Livni raised two main issues: aid to the Palestinians and U.S. treatment of PA President Abbas. She voiced concern that Abbas could be a "fig leaf" for Hamas. In a briefing prior to convening in Livni's office, Berman was asked about the potential for Israeli agricultural cooperation with India and China, facilitated by the United States. END SUMMARY.

When to Stop Funds to the PA?

¶12. (C) Codel Berman met on February 26 with Israeli FM Livni, Deputy Director General for North America Yoram Ben Ze'ev, North American Affairs representative Iris Sapir, and MFA staffers. Livni said that Israel considers the PA a terrorist entity now that Hamas controls a parliamentary majority. She said her major concern is that the international community is trying to find a way to work with the situation rather than confronting the difficulties Hamas presents. Berman replied that the EU and Russia are talking about ways to offer assistance -- some helpful, some not -- and asked Livni how she feels the U.S. is doing in addressing Hamas's new role. Livni answered that the U.S. is strong about the need to stop assistance to a terror organization and that the only difference of opinion relates to timing, with the U.S. refraining from calling the PA a terrorist entity until the new Hamas government is formed. According to Livni, Israel accepts the U.S. approach.

¶13. (C) Berman raised the possibility that the EU would transfer funds to the PA. Livni responded that while Israel would not transfer funds, it would not -- at this point -- try to convince the international community to stop assistance because Israel doesn't want to "open a new gap in discussions." She indicated that the more important issue will be to stop such assistance once Hamas forms a government.

Abbas as Partner vs. Abbas as "Fig Leaf"

¶14. (C) Livni said that some elements in the international community are trying to "find a partner" in the PA, and thus are embracing Abbas. Israel, she said, does not distinguish between "good" and "bad" elements within the PA. Livni expressed concern that Abbas will become a "fig leaf" or "mask" for Hamas. In response to a question from Codel Berman, Livni acknowledged that she had raised this issue with A/S Welch in her meeting the day before, adding that she understands the U.S. is not going to transfer any money to the PA nor to any PA faction, including the president, once the new government is formed. Berman said he understood, from his discussion with A/S Welch, that Welch was trying to dissuade independently elected Palestinians from joining the Hamas government. Livni replied that while this is good news, the idea that independently elected Palestinians could act as partners is a problem and that as long as there is a Hamas government, "there is no legitimate partner."

¶15. (C) According to Livni, Abbas does not believe that Hamas will be accepted by the international community as a legitimate governing authority. That lack of acceptance will then allow him to claim that he, as president/head of the PLO, rather than as PA president, is the legitimate interlocutor with Israel on behalf of the Palestinians. Berman responded that if Abbas does not control all of the security forces, then this claim will be "total fiction." Livni concurred, adding that "Abu Mazen is fiction." She voiced concern that the situation with Abbas and Hamas is a "slippery slope" due to the international community's need to see hope for the peace process, and its belief that Abbas represents that hope.

Potential for U.S. to Facilitate Israeli Agricultural
Cooperation With India and China

¶ 6. (C) In a briefing prior to convening in Livni's office, Nadai asked Berman about the potential for Israeli agricultural cooperation with India and China, facilitated by the United States. Nadai suggested that Israel would like a role in the reported upcoming MOU signing between the U.S. and India. He said that Israel also seeks agricultural cooperation with China in an effort to improve bilateral relations strained by the Harpy drone issue. Berman responded that both issues would require more thought and that there were several people with whom he could raise the India issue.

¶ 7. (U) CODEL Berman did not have the opportunity to clear this message prior to departing post.

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JONES